



Russell M. Shea
Died in the line of duty on November 12, 1982

Description of Act

Russell M. Shea, a thirty-five year veteran firefighter, died of a heart attack on Friday afternoon, November 12, 1982 after fighting a chemical fire at the Matheson Gas Products Company at 61 Grove Street. Shea twice climbed ladders to the roof of the blazing building to help beat down the flames that spread through the chimney to the fiberglass roof. Firefighters said the blaze started from spontaneous ignition of silane gas, which ignites when combined with oxygen, and burned through a first-floor scrubber and spread up the chimney to the roof. Shea was on the ground floor when he collapsed. Firefighters, policemen, and Fire Chief Barry McKay took turns administering emergency medical treatment and putting him in an ambulance where they continued treatment.

Background

Russell M. Shea wore the Number 2 badge in the department at the time of his death. He was born in Gloucester on November 22, 1920, son of Newman and Mabel (Somers) Shea. Shea was a graduate of Gloucester High School, class of 1938. He was a veteran of World War II, serving in the U.S. Navy with the rank of Boatswain's Mate Second Class; he saw action in the Asiatic Pacific theater and the European-Africa-Middle Eastern theater. He had worked through many major fires including those at the Bradford Building, the Good Harbor Beach Inn, and Oceanside and Moorland Hotels, the many Hawthorne Inn fires, and major waterfront fires of 1957 and 1958.

Russell M. Shea was survived by his wife, Patricia Ann (McKay) Shea of Gloucester, a sister Patricia Shea of Gloucester, and several nieces and nephews, including Betty Ann Rich of Gloucester.

Postscripts

"He was just a real nice guy," said firefighter James Griffin, who remembered that each year, after Firefighter's Memorial Sunday, the men went back to Shea's house on 10 Foley Road for refreshments and relaxation.

On September 25, 1983, **Russell M. Shea Square** at the corner of Cherry and Poplar Streets was dedicated in an official city ceremony that included an honor guard of more than 50 off-duty firefighters and an audience of nearly 300 retired firefighters, neighbors and friends.

References

Gloucester Daily Times, November 15, 1982 and September 26, 1983, and personal communications with Gloucester Fire Inspector, Larry Colby.